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Connecticut General Assembly
Planning and Development Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 2100
Public Hearing, Friday, March 15th, 2019
Hartford, CT 06106

Via: Email Attachment

Personal Testimony of Harold Falber of 5 Oak Lane Weston, CT 06883

In strong opposition to HB 7192 in whole and in part that calls for mandatory or incentivized programs that change the structure of town control of any sort over education and the transfer of taxes now collected at town level be given to the state for redistribution as they desire.

Dear esteemed Co-Chairs, McCarthy and Cassano, Ranking Members, Champagne and Zawistowski, Vice-Chairs Baker and Bradley, and members of the Planning and Development Committee:

Once again, I appreciate the opportunity to present my opinion as the state considers change to the way we locally manage our towns' budgets, general town services, and management and funding of school districts/

To reintroduce myself, I am a 33-year resident of Connecticut, a 22-year resident of Weston, having previously lived in Bridgeport, Trumbull and Fairfield, and having owned a business in the Springdale section of Stamford, Harry's TX Barbecue & AZ Grill and served as a board member of Stamford's Chamber of Commerce. I currently serve Weston as an elected commissioner of Planning & Zoning as we work on our 2020 Plan for Conservation & Development. I am a member of the Democratic Party and the Weston DTC.

I am also married to a long-time, highly-respected Connecticut educator and administrator, a principal who also holds her 093 certification. But I wish to point out this testimony represents my personal opinion, and not that of the Town of Weston, the Weston DTC, The Weston Planning & Zoning Commission, the Democratic Party of Connecticut, nor my wife.

As before, I wish to point out, that virtually every small town in Connecticut has a history of exemplary fiduciary management of both town and educational budgets. They have applied cooperative purchasing across many aspects of school district goods and services, with multiple RFPs and strict controls, checks and balances between boards of finance, education, and selectmen. This has been consistently overlooked by this committee and the education committee, and in fact in town meetings, select towns, such as Sterling, have been pointed out as miscreants in fiduciary irresponsibility by having a superintendent and only 400 students. There was no mention of the fact that she held **two** roles, supervised a pre-k – 8 school and the town sent their high school students to a choice of four regional high schools and a tech school. And had a far lower salary for her superintendent duties than one would expect. This kind of misinformation has been constant and the mere fact that the chairman of the education committee accused the small towns surrounding cities of blatant racism was abhorrent.

Sharing of services, i.e. purchasing has been going on in Connecticut for years. Except in the cities, where the record of spending, proper allocation and use of funds, and controls have been less than stellar. This new HB 7192 jumps to a committee concept to set an outcome that towns could not vote on, to turn Connecticut upside down both in local management and education that more than likely would cause a downward spiral in desirability that we will not recover from. **Clearly, HB 7192 clears a path to totalitarian**

government in Connecticut. State supervision will be authoritarian – run from Hartford, which has had a terrible record, including in pension management.

I would like to point out, with respect to education and districts, there is no recommendation to study historical practices and spending, cost of living differentials, controls already established by most towns, why center city schools have failed while next door **Achievement First** schools have found success, no referral to the initial **IDEO** studies done in concert with Achievement First, no lens into any best practice for improvement other than moving children and teachers around. Significantly, it doesn't address difficulties of hunger before school or after, single parents, no parents or two working parents working multiple jobs to just stay above water as contributors to the education issue in the city nor does the bill take into account the already large ECS funds sent into the cities vs. the towns (for example, where you now sit, Hartford gets \$9,600 per student in ECS funds. Norwalk only gets \$966.00).

Year over year, Weston and similar towns, all over the state, have delivered quality education and outcomes with strict financial management and rarely a whiff of misappropriation of funds, misuse of funds, mismanagement of funds or lack of oversight. The very rare times when there have been cases of issues contrary to the highest degree of personal integrity, they have been swiftly dealt with.

When one looks at the state of the state in Connecticut, and the state of our cities, including our capital, financially, educationally, and in municipal and infrastructure oversight, there is no reason, no comfort zone, no rationale to assume that via assigning control of tax dollars and distribution of same or giving control of educational districts to the Hartford-based state legislature will result in any improvement in the quality of education within the cities, and definitely not the small towns of Connecticut – most of which already share some form of regional or shared services and would most likely cause them harm, just based on the record of education in Hartford, New Haven, and Bridgeport to name a few.

The state legislature's and the Governor's bills and amendments only serve to reinforce, without the benefit of "plain English" that there is a large cohort of officials that wish to install an authoritarian government at state level that will only serve a very few and biased interests.

I respectfully ask you to vote against this or similar bills and amendments, allowing towns to manage their own funds while the state negotiates costs for many goods, services, IT needs that a town can bench against, and strongly consider, creating an independently written and bipartisan summary, in simple terms, for the layperson to review for future bills and amendments.

And above all, please resist the ease in which so many legislators speak of "169 towns" with such condescension and disrespect. Perhaps our current form of government just may be the salvation of our country without education district gerrymandering – which is what the continued press for regionalization is beginning to sound like.

Thank you,

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